



ஸ்ரீ Venkateswara ஸ்ரீ சேஷபெருமாள்

An Introduction to
Ramanuja's Philosophy
And
The Doctrine of Prapathi
Or Self-Surrender

By
Nallappa Jeyappaiyengar B.A.
Kancheepuram

DEDICATION

To the hallowed memory of my most respected and highly revered teacher, Prof. P.N. Srinavasachari (late Professor of Philosophy and Principal, Pachaiyappa's College, Madras), that saint-sage of Mylapore, who fed me with the sweetest milk of our unique Faith, almost always putting me on his lap.

67-B, Anaikatti St.,
Kancheepuram-3.

Nallappa Jeyappaiyengar

Preface

The contents of this brochure have been culled from a series of lectures delivered, some years back, to a few foreign missionaries, with whom two or three advanced students of Indian Philosophy also joined in the early stages. This has been latterly touched and simplified, as far as possible, so as to reach a wider field of readers and aspirants in the spiritual field. The direct appeal method has been retained for obvious reasons.

Nallappa Jeeyappaiyengar

INTRODUCTION TO RAMANUJA'S PHILOSOPHY

And

THE DOCTRINE OF PRAPATHI OR SELF-SURRENDER

The quest of Man

What are our doubts and fears? Do we hang in mid air, as an entirely independent being and unsupported by anything? Or, are we propelled by nature as an offshoot of her blind and wayward changes and variations, as a chance figure which a passing cloud puts on, for a moment appearing as something interesting and the next moment disappearing into something meaningless? Is the cosmos that we find in Reality only an exception to chaos, or do we live in a system rational and therefore intelligible? Is good only a whim of the evil reigning in and through all Reality, or does it triumph in spite of it?

The Purpose of Philosophy

But, why should we think about all these at all? Why should we not merely move about, eating, dressing and sleeping, and doing the many other things which we are given to do, as others generally do around us, and then one day quietly pass off into oblivion? Why should we not simply gloat at the presence of pleasure and be pained at the sight of pain, and forget the pleasure when we are pained and forget the pain when we gloat?

Yes; we may do this, as mankind, in general do around us, if we are satisfied with this! But, the fact is, we are not content to be like blind sheep! We want to call ourselves as men on account of our intelligence and discrimination. We want to be proud of the many acts which we think we efficiently do. But, before calling our acts efficient, should we not know first what we really are, and how the acts we do exactly suit with what we really are?

A man lifts a weight of one thousand pounds, and another one thousand five hundred pounds and we call the second man more efficient. A man earns rupees five hundred a month and another earns rupees one thousand and we call the second man more efficient. A monkey leaps from one branch to another and another leaps from tree to another, and we call the second monkey more efficient. And, how are the second weight lifter and the second money earner more efficient the second monkey? Similarly, when we call ourselves more efficient than others, are we more efficient as mere animals, or as real thinking beings? Do we like to be classed among animals, or among the mankind in general who are no better than animals in competing to satisfy the needs of the physical body which is dying every moment before our very eyes, or do we like to be classed among a few real men who call themselves men, because, they pause, 'from the madding

crowds' ignoble strife', and think weigh and consider, infer and generalise, and then act with the courage of their conviction?

The wise and the lay

"Yaa nisaa sarva bhoothaanaam", says the Gita, "thasyaam jaagrathi samyami, yasyaam jagrathi bhoothani saa nisaa pasyatho muneh". What is night for the whole world is day for the wise, and what is day for the whole world is night for the wise. In other words, the wise are quite awake to those things over which the whole world sleeps, and they quite sleep over those things to which the whole world is wide awake. If we are to be proud as real men, should we not, instead of blindly and slavishly aping others around us, know first what we really are, and how we are in fact related to Reality, what our final goal in life is, and how we could reach it, so that what we do can conduce to either maintain our nature in Reality or help to achieve our ultimate and real purpose in life?

Knowability of Reality

After all, Reality is not as difficult to be apprehended as it is thought of by some, provided we proceed in the right line. However much one may step forward and assert that Reality is unknowable, in that very assertion one should grant that Reality is knowable! For, man is essentially a rational being and for him to assert anything at all is to assert it rationally. But, to assert anything rationally, he must grant the fundamental postulate of reason or logic, that Reality is a system. Without granting this fundamental postulate of logic that Reality is a system, he can have no ground for any kind of argument at all! Now, the definition of a system is that it is a whole, consisting of interdependent parts, which are so related to each other that from understanding the nature of some of them, we can proceed to know what the nature of others is.

Man is not entirely foreign to or independent of Reality in which he lives. His breath is the very life of Reality; his blood is the very wine of Reality; his flesh is the very bread of Reality; his dress is the very cloth of Reality and his thoughts are of the very incidents of Reality. So, to live apart from Reality is only to die; and to think apart from Reality is simply to sleep without even dreaming. So, to live is to live in Reality, to think is to think in Reality and to think rationally is to think within a rational Reality! Unless one wants to be mad, to assert rationally that Reality is unknowable is to posit a contradiction in terms. To think rationally at all is to grant that Reality is a system and therefore knowable.

We may not as yet know enough; we may not know some still in their true light; we may have to correct our views about some; but these considerations should not be the bar to the fundamental knowability of Reality on which foundation alone all the philosophies and religions and all the other sciences rest. The very fact that we know some is the very guarantee for our further knowing others. It is why a Kant has sprung after Hume, and a Hegel after Kant and a Bergson after Hegel. It is why a Sankara has come after Buddha, a Ramanuja after Sankara, and Madhva after Ramanuja and so on. ("There is an affinity between the structure of the world and mind of man. Our sense perceptions, our logical

concepts, our intuitive apprehensions are not forms superimposed on reality, but are determinate forms of Reality itself." - Radhakrishnan - "An Idealist View of Life" P-333.)

The five fundamental topics

For fear of swelling the volume of this introduction, we need not dwell into all the different views expressed as regards the five fundamental topics which should vitally concern us if we are to behave rationally and as real men, that is (1) the real nature of ultimate Reality (2) the true nature of the individual self which is related to it, (3) the final goal of life, (4) the paths to it, and (5) the impediments to it. But it is very important to bear in mind that the times are gone, when, in the evolution of thought and philosophy, it was merely materialism that ruled the day. Equally true is the fact that the days are gone when it was simply the spirit that ruled the day. Equally too, the days are gone when "the many" was sacrificed for the sake of "the one", and "the one" for the sake of "the many". We have after all come to live in an age, which will recognise only that philosophy, which gives the most comprehensive as well as the most consistent view of life, (giving room for least abstraction) as true to Reality. Similarly too, only that religion will stand which will give credit to the greatest amount of love and tolerance, guaranteeing the maximum of bliss with the minimum of conditions to the greatest number of human beings in the shortest possible time, having at the same time as its background, a workable philosophy of Reality. (The opposition that has generally prevailed between philosophy and religion in the West for a long time is entirely foreign and unknown to Hinduism, which has been resting always on the different views expressed on the five fundamental topics, already referred to above.)

Universality of Religion

After all, religion is only a codification of the true experience of those who have felt the irresistible grace of the Almighty within their very beings, with a view to lift one to the highest plane of happiness. And, the grace of God is not limited to one clime or clan alone. A mere glance of the history of comparative religion will show that these gifted people, who have experienced the direct grace of God, are not scattered in one country alone, or at one time alone, but they have been present, here and there, everywhere, at all times and in every walk of life. The late Rev. Dr. Miller, the founder of the Christian College, Madras, who spent a considerable period of his life in South India, most vehemently expressed his views when he said, "Those outside the pale of Christendom are as really under the care of the Almighty Father as those who are within that pale. He has made one very nation of men; from Him the source of being equally proceeds over each. Whether it be Jew or Gentile, whether Christian or Heathen, He equally rules - God is equally near to all and is waiting to be found by all. Now, this great truth, the nearness of God to all men, the truth that the place of birth of all men, with all the consequences as to the custom, belief and character entailed by it, is in some true and important sense the appointment of God in His all watchful love; this truth which determined the whole tone and form of Paul's speech at Athens is a truth which I can hardly suppose that any Christian will expressly deny. It is too emphatically the spirit of the Master, as well as the

express teaching of the apostle, who laboured most abundantly of all, to be contradicted by one who has any reverence for either"

One religion may stress one point and another, another point; one religion may overlook one fact and another, another fact. One religion may call God infinite and another as finite. One religion may view God as formless and another as formful. One religion may call God as father and another as mother. One religion may call Him as truth and another as beauty and another as good and another as love, and another as any two or three or four of these. One may point to duty as the way, and another, knowledge as the way, and another, love as the way, and another, self-surrender as the way, and another God Himself as the way. One may point to peace as the goal and another bliss as the goal and another selfless service as the goal. But where is the point for contradiction and quarrel among all these? The fact remains that all these kinds of religion have sprung from one and the same source. And, have we not reached as yet that stage where we can follow the policy of "give and take" at least in religion, if not in other fields? And, if we really come face to face with one to which we can give nothing and from which we can take nothing, have we no ground to move with it as "comrades in arms"? In the light of these liberal considerations and broad outlook, which the spirit of the times should not grudge to concede, let us consider the philosophy and religion of Ramanuja in their broad outlines, with some historic background.

Hinduism before Ramanuja

It is generally acknowledged by all impartial critics of Vedic Philosophy and religion that the Vedic age, at one period, drifted into a state of mere formalism when only ceremonials and sacrifices prevailed. The Karmakanda grew to such an extent as to almost overshadow the Gnanakanda. The Yagnas and Yagas ruled the day. In the words of Radhakrishnan, "In spite of suggestions of a higher ethics and religion, it must be said that the age was on the whole one of Pharisaism in which people were more anxious about the completion of their sacrifices than the perfection of their souls"(Indian Philosophy, Vol.I (second edition). Many were the cruelties that were meted out to the animals in the name of religion. Many innocent lives were slaughtered at the altar of truth. And Buddhism sprang as a strong protest against the atrocities and cunning cruelties which were committed with religious sanctions. These at last grew to such an extent that an all-merciful God could no longer brook them and it was necessary for Him to appear in the person of Buddha.

The orthodox Vaidik Pandits are considerate enough to acknowledge Buddha as an Avathara (incarnation of God), though, it is a pity, they ignore the real purpose of this Avathara when they call him a "Mohana Avathara" (incarnation to cheat). Buddhism was nothing more and nothing less than the purging of Vedic religion of all its blind ceremonials, meaningless rigidities, and cruel sacrifices. The disease of Hinduism grew, at the time, to be so chronic that the ministrations of Buddhism were necessary for more than a thousand years. Necessarily, and quite justifiably, this period was one of strong prejudice against the Vedas.

But, in course of time, Buddhism decayed. Many cults grew within it, and not even one among them had to offer anything positive as the Purusharta or the summum bonum of life. In the words of Max Mauller, "We see in the Buddhist doctrines as how it (Nirvana) was used by the Buddhists, at first, in the simple sense of freedom from passion, but was developed higher and higher, till in the end, it became altogether negative" (The six systems of Indian Philosophy, page - 388). Here it is not without its parallel. The history of philosophy from Descartes to Hume is an exact reflection of the fate of Hinduism under review. All students of Western Philosophy know that the epistemological theory started by the all doubting Descartes met its suicidal end in the hands of Hume. That is where unbridled reasoning will lead to, and it is important to take note of this also. It is how Buddhism of pure reason ended.

So, the age once again needed some new vitality to pull on, which the Vedas and the intuitions of the Upanishads alone could furnish. This rehabilitation of the Vedas, into an age which had long forgotten them, Holy Sankara undertook. (But the way had been already paved for him by the propounders of the Sutras especially those of the Naiyayika System.) Not a little credit is due to him in this respect. It is through his genius alone that the Vedas came to be re-established, but with its old disease cured, its meaningless shibboleths and bitter cruelties purged out. **With whatever critical mind some among modern philosophers may view Sankara's philosophy, it was he and he alone who was responsible for making Hinduism once more Vaidik and holy.** Let those who would criticize his philosophy as resting on doubt and skepticism or tending towards nihilism or atheism consider it in relation to his times. His was the only philosophy that could have been preached in those days. Otherwise Buddhistic India could never have become Vedic India. ["All these estimates imply that Sankara incorporated certain Buddhistic elements, such as the doctrine of Maya and Monasticism, into the Vedanta Philosophy. It is held that, in an endeavour to preserve the continuity of thought he attempted to combine logically, incompatible ideas. However credible this might be to the elasticity of Sankara's mind or his spirit of genuine toleration, it cannot but affect the logical rigour of his thought; and the theory of Maya serves as a cloak to cover the inner rifts of his system." - Radhakrishnan in Indian Philosophy Vol. 2 (Second edition) Page 471.]

A person with a sympathetic approach can see no vital difference between the philosophy of Sankara and that of Ramanuja. Sankara's Maya viewed as Bhava (as a positive content), gives the most of Ramanuja's philosophy by its then becoming the latter's Prakriti and Atman (matter and individual souls within it.) Again, **as far as the religion is concerned, which is the thing that after all matters, there is no essential difference between Sankara and Ramanuja.** (But we find a large number of passages in Sankara, which indicate while the released soul attains at the very moment of release a universality of spirit, it yet retains its individuality as a centre of action as long as the cosmic process continues. The freed soul, so long as the cosmic process continues, participates in it and returns to embodied existence, not for its own sake but for the sake of the whole. He has the feeling of kinship with all (Sarva Atma Bhava); he identifies himself with the universal movement and follows its course. As eternal life is a changed mode of living, it has little to do with the assumption of body. The freed souls touch the

fringe, but do not enter the cloud; or to use another famous metaphor, they enter the light, but do not touch the flame." These are exactly Ramanuja's view. Vide Radhakrishnan's "An Idealist View of Life - Page 306 & 307)

If the whole world is a bare illusion, and does not exist, why should we be concerned about anything in this world at all? Why should we be troubled in the least if our faces are reflected grotesquely as concave or convex in a hypothetical mirror? No, the truth is, the world is too much to be thrown away merely as a false imaginary snake, only threatening to bite certain deluded mortals till they realise that it is after all a rope. The snake actually bites, and we are full of the poison! For a true understanding of the real Sankara, let the sympathetic critic refer to that section in Radhakrishnan's Indian Philosophy entitled "Is the world an Illusion", in the chapter 'Advaitic Vedanta of Sankara', where he depicts the true Sankara as almost a forerunner of Ramanuja. **The truth of the whole matter is the Advaitic Vedanta, necessary and splendid at the age of Sankara, soon took a wrong turn in the hands of his followers. In the words of Radhakrishnan, "If, instead of regarding the world as something for the rise of which we cannot offer an adequate explanation, we at the same time, following the lead of some latter Advaitins, dismiss it as a cosmic illusion, which has somehow arisen to afflict us - deluded mortals, of an evil dream, then the system becomes unsatisfactory."** [Indian Philosophy, Vol.2 (second edition) Page 656.]

Therefore, it is no wonder that many were the criticisms levelled against such a corrupted turn given to Vedic religion. Many were prone to call such a changed Advaita as even tending to Atheism. So, the need for a practical philosophy embodying the requirements of a true and living religion was greatly felt. A philosophic religion which coldly ignores the personal values of truth, beauty, goodness and love, and does not offer humane solutions for human wants, will not, and cannot receive general acceptance, nor can it be true to Reality. And for a constructive turn along these lines to Vedic philosophy and religion, we owe an ocean of gratitude to Ramanuja and his immediate predecessors, certain sages and saints, who had a great influence on him.

Accepting the traditional instruments of knowledge or 'Pramanas' viz., 'Prathyaksham', 'Anumanam', and 'Sabdam', (sense-perception, inference and intuition or revelation), Ramanuja most vehemently pleads that it should be neither necessary nor would it be justifiable for us to totally negate the very existence of the world or lower and phenomenal Reality as illusion in the interest of the Absolute or Brahman. Nor need we deny every kind of determination to the content of Ultimate Reality or Brahman, the Supreme and call Him a 'Nirgunan' (quality-less) on the basis of certain negative statements of some Srutis (Upanishads) like 'Neti Neti'. Such negative accounts are to be taken only as significant negations meant to emphasise only the transcendental aspect of Brahman. ("There is a danger in these negative descriptions. By denying all attributes and relations we expose ourselves to the charge of reducing the ultimate Being to bare existence which is absolute vacuity. The negative account is intended to express the soul's sense of transcendence of God" - Radhakrishnan in An Idealist View of Life, Page 102).

According to Ramanuja, Reality is one concrete spiritual-material system, infinite and eternal and therefore admitting of no second. **It should be noted that Ramanuja too is an Advaitin (Monist), not an abstract Advaitin, but a concrete Advaitin (Visishtadvaitin).** This concrete living system of Reality admits of three distinct categories or entities, the material, the spiritual, and the super-spiritual, all the three of which, though eternally distinct, are inseparably and organically related to each other. Two of these entities, the world of matter and the realm of spirits, eternally exist as modes or 'Prakaras' or Visheshanas' or substantial attributes or concrete adjectives to the third which is the substratum or prop or 'Prakari', which by virtue of its subtler nature than the modes, is permeating in and through them all as their sustainer, ruler and appropriator.

In the popular language of religion, Reality consists of three categories, Chit, Achit and Iswara (individual souls, matter and God). The first two are, as already pointed out, the modes or 'Prakaras' or Visheshanas or adjectives of the third which is their 'Prakari'. These two modes, Chit and Achit are neither identical with God as abstract Advaitins would have it, nor are they entirely external or foreign to God as uncompromising pluralists as Dwaitins would have it. Though eternally distinct from God, Chit and Achit are inseparably and organically related to Him as modes, as a fruit and its qualities are inseparably related to one another. Both matter and souls form the body, as it were, of God, who is their inner soul and guide. This inseparable relationship or the "Aprathaksiddha Sambandha" of Iswara and His modes, which form the rest of Reality, is popularly known as the "Sarira Atma Sambandha" or the "Body and soul relationship" and this is the unique feature or the "Pradhana Prati Tantra" (the differential) of Ramanuja's system, as distinguished from the other systems of Vedanta.

Some of the Upanishads, like the famous Brahadaranyaka text "Aham Brahmasmi" would seem to posit the entire identity of the individual soul with the Supreme. But some others like the splendid Swetasvakara simile of the two birds sitting on the same tree, (one enjoying the fruits and the other simply witnessing the other) explain the two, viz., the individual soul and the Supreme, in terms of absolute difference. And, it will be found that Ramanuja, while interpreting such varied texts of the Upanishads, will lose neither the wood for the trees nor the trees for the wood. The Brahma Sutras of Badarayana (Vyasa) himself are, according to many impartial Western critics, like Thibaut, having this main purpose in view, that is, reconciliation of apparently incompatible or even contradictory texts. By the theory of inseparable relationship between the one and the many, and this is grounded on the modern impeccable logical concept of identity in difference, Ramanuja successfully reconciles all the varied and manifold intuitions of the Vedic Seers. With his unique gift of universal sympathy, wide outlook and broad accommodation, he finds no difficulty in fulfilling the real intention of the author of the Brahma Sutras in formulating a clear, comprehensive and consistent philosophy of Vedanta, sacrificing none of the main aspects of the spiritual experiences of the Vedic seers. ("Many students of Vedanta, notably Thibaut favour the view that Ramanuja is more faithful to the intention of the author: - Radhakrishnan in Indian Philosophy, Second edition, Page 469.) ("There are certainly some Sutras, which, as Dr. Thibaut has shown, lend themselves far more readily to Ramanuja's than to Sankara's interpretation. The question as to the nature of the individual souls seems decided by the

author of the Sutras in favour of Ramanuja rather than of Sankara - Max Muller, in The Six systems of Indian Philosophy, Page 249).

The two worlds

On the authority of the Srutis, Ramanuja holds that a major portion of Reality, which is called "Nithya Vibhuti" (Parama Pada) knows neither disharmony nor pain as also such contingencies like creation and deluge (Srishti and Pralaya), struggle for life and survival of the fittest, do not apply to it. It is an infinite, harmonious and blissful court, consisting of those who are ever free (Nithyas) and those who have been liberated from earthly bondage (Muktas), who enjoy an equality of status with the Absolute or Supreme Being (Brahman) in omniscience and bliss, and each contributing to the ever-increasing joy of the whole and the whole contributing to the ever-increasing bliss of each, in their eternal and infinite life of reciprocal attraction and love, sacrifice and service. Concepts such as creation and deluge, disharmony and pain, are applicable only to a part of Reality called the Lila Vibhuti to which alone we, matter-bound individuals, belong.

It is to be noted that, according to Ramanuja, the principle of relativity reigns out and out all through Reality. Only in the case of some, it is disharmonious and painful, whereas, in the case of others it is harmonious and blissful. The Absolute, which abounds in an infinity of perfections, is no doubt transcendental and eludes the full comprehension of the finite, but It is also, in a sense, what and how It is to the finite. It is rich and concrete in as much as It inheres in all the finites, and, at the same time, It is eminent and grand in the sense that It transcends the full apprehension of the finite at every step. ("While being immanent in the universe, God also transcends it. The idea of immanence guarantees the intimacy of union between God and the finite self; and the concept of transcendence justifies the absolute infinity and perfection of Godhead and inspires religion, reverence and humility" - Prof. PN. Srinivasachari, in The Cultural Heritage of India Vol.I, Page 564.) The closer the finite approaches It, the more It yields Its transcendence, but, at the same time, the greater It becomes the same in Itself in the eye of the finite. Though it is never completely and perfectly comprehended - this will not be possible as Its very nature is infinite - It is ever being richly apprehended. It cannot be otherwise in a living system of Reality which is infinite and eternal. The recognition of the principle of 'identity in difference' makes this rich experience a harmony, and the inseparability of truth, beauty, goodness and love in their various shades and grades makes this experience blissful.

The three kinds of souls

Following the Srutis, Ramanuja classifies the conscious finite beings (Jeevatmas), who are again infinite in number, into three kinds (1) those who struggle to progress towards an eternally harmonious and blissful life (Bhaddhas), (2) those who had been once struggling towards but are now experiencing such life (Muktas), and (3) those who have been, for ever, experiencing such a life, without being subjected to any kind of bondage at any time (Nithyas). The existence of the first of these three classes should stand as an additional contribution and complement to the life of bliss in others as it yields full scope for their eternal sympathy, ever increasing love, and never-ceasing sacrifice and service.

In an infinity of finites properly conceived, there should be no fear of the first of these classes of souls (Bhaddhas) being exhausted at any time. For, four minus two is two, and four minus four is zero only according to finite mathematics. But according to mathematics of infinity, such limited calculations cannot hold water. Infinity minus one is infinity, and infinity minus a million will still be infinity, the concept of infinity being fully realised. So, the world will go on for ever with its class of struggling souls in spite of the elevation of some of many of them to the plane of higher freedom, happiness and bliss. To cite a popular example, there will always be as many fish in the sea as can ever be caught out!

One need not fear from this that the lot of a class of souls will be to suffer, for ever, in their earthly bondage. For, we see in nature a limit set to one's suffering. When this limit is reached and the condition threatens to be intolerable, one is either stupefied as from the effect of chloroform, or taken away from that sphere as by death, or being consciously confronted with the ultimate problem of suffering one is given the possibility of complete redemption from it. So, there will be nowhere suffering of an intolerable kind and the moment the lesson of suffering is learnt, a contingency possible in human cases, one is face to face with the problem and possibility of release. After all, in the infinitude of Reality, which is teeming with millions and billions of life all through, the sphere of human life is but infinitesimally minute and here we have always the chances of redemption. So, there need be no difficulty in accepting this full picture of Reality as conceived by Ramanuja.

A glimpse into life infinite

Complete identity, absolute difference, bare negation, perfect vacuity, permanent rest, first cause, creation out of nothing, final perfection, and similar other concepts are according to Ramanuja, only hypostasizations or wrong assumptions incidental to or arising from a finite consciousness, which should all vanish from the point of view of real or ultimate truth. These constricted notions are liable to inhere in the finite consciousness only as far as there is progress towards a full realisation of ultimate truth, and not after it has been in it, nor after it has had even the faintest mystic glimpse of it. It will be terribly grand to catch even a distant glimpse of such a rich, concrete and living vision of ultimate Reality which Ramanuja truly and faithfully mirrors, expanding for ever and for ever in harmony and bliss and free from any kind of fear or pain. It will be an unwinding of an eternal plot or of many plots within a plot, with one unique Hero in it, the individual spirit being sometimes in the one and sometimes out of it into another, but watching, at the same time, by virtue of its freed and expanded consciousness the life of others with interest, and having at the same time a rich and infinitely varied scenery or background behind. The clue to the final solution of the ultimate plot, is perhaps, or is not yet perhaps, in the hands of the Absolute or the Supreme. Or, the concept of ultimate finality itself may be, after all only a type of false assumption or hypostasization. Again, finality may not be incompatible with eternal possibilities. One major plot may get solved, and for a moment giving a sense of finality and relief, but at the same time lead into another the next moment revealing a bigger plot waiting yet, and so on. For, it should be remembered, we are dealing with life in its fullest sense, with infinity and eternity as its

twin adjuncts, which should really admit of no limits. Our life here, on earth itself, is, in a sense, or to a certain extent, such only, but with the contingency of pain and suffering attached to it. This leads to the next question as to what makes our life on earth painful.

Life in Bondage

Among the individual souls we have seen three classes, the Nithyas or the ever free, the Muktas or the liberated and the Bhaddas or those who are on earth struggling in their material limitations. We are not at present concerned with more than what has already been said regarding the former two classes, nor are we concerned here with a detailed account of the subtle changes and distinctions to which matter (Aчит) is subjected in its manifestations from the subtle to the gross and vice versa. We are primarily concerned only with the Bhadda Atmas or matter-bound individuals, as to them only concepts such as disharmony and pain, ethics and endeavour, redemption and release have real application. These Bhadda Atmas are, as said in the Srutis, placed in juxtaposition with a gross or mongrel type of matter (Gunathriya Atmaka Prakriti) the nature of which is to ever change with its positive, negative and neutral forces (The modern conception of original or primordial matter not as unbreakable atoms, but as positive, negative and neutral electric energies, very nearly conforms to this theory which is familiar to Indian thought from very ancient times. (Rajas, Tamas and Sathva), creating fresh forms always, and giving rise thereby to an infinite variety of petty and perishable objects so as to be called by different names, and which either attract or repel these atmas according to their varied temperaments and tastes. They not only attract and repel, but also, by ever drawing the attention of these souls towards themselves, keep them away from realising their own essential and inherent attributes such as immortality, luminosity, wisdom, bliss and dependence (Seshatva) on the one and only Lord and Ruler of this universe. Every bound soul is caught up within an ever revolving vicious circle consisting of a five fold clutch, viz., Avidya (the primary illusion of mistaking the mortal body for the immortal self, Karma (the deluded acts that follow thereby), Vasana (the blind attractions that persist), Ruchi (the false tastes that drive one on and on to the material objects, and Prakriti Sambanda (the material bondage that again and again results), and is therefore subject to the trials and tribulations, the difficulties and sufferings that are incidental to such false identification, unnatural attachment, and binding relationship with an ever changing and ever perishing matter through all the births and deaths, though it has got the innate possibility of freedom and transcendence from these painful material limitations.

Cosmology and Teleology

In the state of Pralaya, or the period between deluge and creation, these Baddha Atmas lie entirely enmeshed in a condition of complete lethargy in the primordial matter (Muloo-Prakriti) which is then motionless and still in its subtlest state, keeping its three qualities, Sathva, Rajas and Tamas in balance. The very 'Srishti' (Creation or the starting of evolution) is, according to Ramanuja, due to the infinite grace of God, as by this He makes it possible, for those Baddha Atmas lying then completely crushed and jammed, in matter in total loss of their infinite potentialities to evolve, step by step and more and

more, and in some exceptional cases, by leaps and bounces, so as to ultimately transcend their material limitations and finally enjoy a state equal to those who are ever free. Just as the heart of a kind father will lie lingering with the fortunes of a son who is absent in a foreign clime far off from his sweet home, even though the father may be having the pleasant presence of ninety nine sons with him, the heart of God, who is in essence full (Poornam) and free from every kind of want or desire (Avapta Samasta Kaman), yet lies lingering with those who painfully suffer on earth, caught up in the bundle of limitations and, as already said, the very Srishti is for their gradual uplift and final redemption. "From this point of view", says Prof. P.N. Srinivasachari, "even Pralaya and Srishti are merely an expression of the divine will to redeem all beings. When the Universe is steeped in sensuality and sin, the Lord in his infinite mercy, suspends for a while the cosmic process, and thus deprives the self of its instruments of evil; this is Pralaya. Srishti affords a fresh opportunity to the Jiva to pursue the path of duty and ascend to the world of grace" (Visishtadwaita of Ramanuja" - The cultural Heritage of India Vol.1, Page 565). Thus, according to Ramanuja, the life of the lower and phenomenal Reality is neither an illusion nor does it stand as an antithesis to God, but springs from God's grace as an evolution in the interest of a class of souls whose lot it is to have been suffering from the without beginning in an unnatural and foreign element. ("This view of the universe as a development of Brahman was possibly the original view taken by Badarayana, and it was clearly that of Ramanuja and his followers who explained the world as an evolution (Parinama). But this was not Sankara's theory. He accepts the two facts that the world is changing and unreal and yet the cause of it that is Brahman is incapable of change" - Max Muller - The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy, Page 367).

Avatara or Incarnation

The evolution, so far as life below the level of man is concerned, is, to a large extent all right and generally conforms to the laws of nature which assist it in its onward march. Only in the case of man in whom consciousness has widened and has assumed a certain amount of freedom, it is in the danger of taking an unnatural turn. Hence he requires certain rules as guides, and the Vedas and Shastras exist to show the different ways and means which may vary according to the varied stages and temperaments of the struggling individuals in their onward march of evolution. The rules of Varna and Asrama (one's caste and station in life) exist only for this purpose. But, as time rolls on, these rules are subject to the possibility of transgression through the ignorance of man. They are not only transgressed but are also perverted in course of time, and this is why Lord Krishna has used the word 'Dharma' in the abstract in His famous Avatara Sloka in the Gita, "Whenever and wherever virtue pines, fades and wanes (Dharmasya Glanirbhavati) and vice waxes, then I myself appear forth on earth, O Bharata!" It is only this perversion of Dharma, more than its transgression, that really necessitates His personal appearance, so that by taking Avatara (incarnation) and by personal conduct He may set right Dharma. Again, it is this perverted conception of Dharma, forced to be maintained and followed by certain ill-informed or crooked minded pedants of the Shastras, that makes the life of real Sadhus more painful than all the disturbances of the unrighteous, and whenever this condition becomes intolerable it is through grace and love for them that He appears

personally before their eyes to clear their doubts and obstacles and grant them succour, and the destruction and the unrighteous only comes by the way.

Archa or Image worship

We have seen that God, apart from His transcendental state in the Nithya Vibhuti (Paratva) works for Srishti (Creation), and again takes incarnation, from time to time, to set right Dharma. We have also noted His omnipresence through His own innate subtlety throughout Reality as its inner sustainer, succourer and saviour. According to Ramanuja, the workings of God, apart from His transcendental state (Paratva), in His casual (Vyuha), the purposive (Vibhava), and the innate (Antaryamitva) are only different expressions and stages of His condescension (Soulabhya) and grace (Kripa), and there is a fifth, that is, the 'Archa' or the physical which marks the culmination of His condescension and grace whereby He actually and lovingly delimits Himself to be physically present in whatever form His lovers and devotees wish, answering to whatever name they give. Nay, it is not even His self-limitation, but it is rather the creative urge of love, whereby He becomes fuller than the fullest and higher than the highest! ("The idea of Avatara (incarnation) does not imply any kind of limitation, or self limitation. It shows the infinite creative power of love", Prof. PN Srinivasachari - Visishtadwaita of Ramanuja - The Cultural Heritage of India Vol.-I, Page 565.) And temples, according to Srivaishnavas who are the followers of Ramanuja, are rooted in this infinite condescension, tolerance and pliability of the Almighty. ("The image - and it is but an image - the image under which the operative growth of God's nature is best conceived, is that of a tender care that nothing be lost." - Whitehead - "Process and Reality", vide page 330 in Radhakrishnan's An Idealist View of Life [footnote].)

Considered psychologically, these five states of the Almighty, the Paratva, the Vyuha, the Vibhava, the Antaryamitva and the Archa, are as though the responses of the Supreme and the absolute to the religious cravings in man manifesting through his five sheaths (or Kosas) mentioned in the Upanishads, namely, Anandamaya (blissful), Vignanamaya (casual), Manomaya (mental), Pranamaya (emotional or Astral) and the Annamaya (Physical). God's Paratva answers to man's Anandamaya Kosa; His Vyuha to man's Vignanamaya Kosa; His Vibhava, to his Manomaya Kosa; His Antaryamitva to his Pranamaya Kosa; and His Archa to his Annamaya Kosa - Whereas in the case of man the latter three of these sheaths are largely affected, conditioned and spoiled by his material bondage arising from Avidya and Karma, in the case of God, His states, apart from His Paratva are the expressions of His Kripa or Grace and Sowlabhya or Condescension. The more man becomes limited through Avidya and Karma the more God extends His Sowlabhya or Condescension through Kripa or grace. (I, the Lord of the Universe, exist in five states becoming more and more condescending through compassion and love the more the man on earth becomes immersed in the material mire of Samsara) And this is the wonderful message which Ramanuja caught from the Srutis and preached to the people. In the words of Max Muller, "Of course with Ramanuja also Brahman is the highest reality, Omnipotent, Omniscient, but this Brahman is at the same time full of compassion or love. This is a new and very important feature in Ramanuja's Brahman as

compared with the icy self-sufficiency ascribed to Brahman by Sankara." - The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy, page 245.)

The popularity of image worship

We have seen how image worship in temples which is one of the main features of Vaishnavism, naturally and rationally fits into Ramanuja's Philosophic religion. As there is much confusion and misunderstanding regarding this aspect of worship, some more clarification of the position should not be out of place here. To confess, the author of this introduction had his own doubts about the propriety of this aspect of worship till late in his life. But, after perusing the famous Chicago address of Swami Vivekananda, he was let to be tolerant to admit its efficacy. To quote the relevant portion of the speech which kept spellbound his large American audience, "Descend we now from the aspirations of philosophy to the religion of the ignorant In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers apply all the attributes of God including the Omnipresence to the images. I remember, when a boy, a Christian was preaching to a crowd in India. Among other sweet things he was asking the people, he asked, if he gave a blow to their idol with his stick what it could do. One of his hearers sharply answered, 'If I abuse your God what can He do?' 'You would be punished', said the preacher, 'when you die'. 'So, my idol would punish you when you die!' said the villager. The tree is known by the fruit, and when I have seen among them that are called idolaters, men the like of whose morality and spirituality and love I have never seen anywhere, I stop and ask myself, "Can sin beget holiness?".....

"Superstition is the enemy of man, but bigotry is worse. Why does a Christian go to Church? Why is the Cross holy? Why is the face turned towards the sky in prayer? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church? Why are there so many images in the minds of Protestants when they pray? My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a material image than we can live without breathing. And by the law of association, the material image calls the mental idea up and vice versa.".....

"As we find that, somehow or other, by the laws of our constitution we have to associate our ideas of infinity with the image of the blue sea or of the sky, some connect naturally their ideas of holiness with the image of a Church or a Mosque or a Cross. The Hindus have associated the ideas of holiness, purity, truth, Omnipresence and all other such ideas with different images and forms."

Rabindranath Tagore, in his own characteristic style, puts a similar theory in the mouth of the hero in his well known social novel - Gora, "When you see that idol in your aunt's room", he says, "you see only a stone. But I see the tender heart of your aunt filled with devotion. Seeing that, how can I get angry or feel contempt?"....."I only want to say that what you call abusively an idol is something that you cannot comprehend merely by seeing it with your eyes. Those who regard it with a tranquil mind, whose hearts find satisfaction in it, and whose natures find refuge in it, they are the ones who know whether this idol is mortal or immortal, limited or limitless. I assure you that no

worshipper in our country ever offers his devotion to what is limited.....the joy of their worship is to lose the limits within the limited."

Radhakrishnan reflects the same ideas when he says, "Idolatry is a much abused term. Even those who abuse it are unable to escape from it.But, as a matter of fact, religion cannot escape symbolism, from icons and crucifixes and from rites and dogmas. These forms are employed by religion to focus its faith, but when they become more important than the faith itself, we have idolatry. A symbol does not subject the infinite to the finite, but renders the finite transparent. It aids us to see the infinite through it." (The Cultural Heritage of India - Introduction, Page XXV)

After the author came upon similar passages written by eminent thinkers, he should own, that he was led to be tolerant and only tolerant enough to admit the efficacy of temple worship from the point of view of the ignorant and lay who are not given to high philosophic soarings. But, later in life, when he came to know of a little catholic incident, connected with Ramanuja's life, the whole of his being and attitude towards Archa or temple worship became transformed. Ramanuja was once going on his usual round of alms receiving (according to the order of Sanyasis enjoined in the Shastras) when a few children were playing on the road, drawing an image of God on sand. When Ramanuja was passing by them, they arrested his attention and said that there was their God. At once Ramanuja, giving the begging bowl to one of his disciples, fell prostrate before that figure of God drawn by the children. When his disciples look agape at his face as if to question his sincerity, Ramanuja sharply quoted this (Tamizh) hymn from one of the earliest of Dravidian saints, "*Thamar ugandadu evvuruvam avvuruvam thane*", meaning,

"Whatever form His lovers wish, that form He takes;
Whatever name His lovers give to that name, He answers;
Howsoever they ceaselessly love and think of Him,
Thatsoever way He responds who shines with infinite power and grace."

The immortal author of the Gita warrants the same when he says, "Ye Yathaa Maam Prapadyante thaam sthathaiva bhajaamyaham." In whatsoever way do men approach me in that same way do I gladly yield to be worshipped." Can there be a further limit to divine condescension? And temples, according to Ramanuja, as well as his Vaishnavite predecessor sages and saints, who have always felt the living presence of the Almighty within them, are rooted in this infinite condescension or Sowlabhya of an all merciful Almighty.

It is well for an adverse critic of the idols to call them limited. But, does he realise, when he is doing so, he is setting a limit to the love and grace of his own God? When such blind and material forces like the electricity yield to be pressed into service howsoever we wish, will not an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-gracious living Being yield to suite the tastes of our, after all, devotional and religious cravings? A great Vaishnavite teacher, by name Lokacharya, who was a true follower of Ramanuja, asks, who can get his thirst quenched with the mere promise of water from underground or from the clouds?

For the thirst to be quenched, one should get it through a well or a pipe! And, which child will be so mad as to think that the water it sees in a well or a pipe is all that the whole of reality contains? While the teachers of these adverse critics have promised their God only after death, or perhaps only after many a death and birth more, these gifted Vaishnavite teachers have brought Him near us and shown Him before our very eyes here and now!

Ethics

Thus far we have seen, in their main outlines, the ontological, the cosmological, the teleological, and the psychological aspects of Ramanuja's system of philosophic religion. We have also seen how worship of God in the physical form of Archa or images in temples naturally fits into his all-embracing philosophy and all-loving religion. We have yet to see only one aspect more, the ethical. The message of Ramanuja in ethics is the message of the Gita viewed impartially. To him, it is not Gnana or knowledge alone that will lead one to Moksha or liberation as according to Sankara, nor Karma or duty alone as according to Poorva Mimamsa School, nor these two alone allied as according to Bhaskar and Yadhava (the Samuchya Vadins, who stood midway between Sankara and Ramanuja), but it is Bhakti or devotion and devotion alone but disciplined by right conduct and true wisdom that will unfailingly lead one to liberation. Mere Gnana is cold, mere Karma is blind and dull, but when the two are allied to Bhakti or devotion, they get their real warmth, colour and life.

Ramanuja is against abstraction of any kind. In his philosophy, in his religion, in his ethics, he displays such a wonderful comprehensiveness of mind as we find in none else. In the words of Radhakrishnan, "Ramanuja had the greatness of a religious genius. Ideas flowed in on him from various sources, the Upanishads and the Agamas, the Puranas and Prabhandam (the intuitive outpourings of Dravidian Saints). He responded to them all with some side of his religious genius. All their different elements are held together in the indefinable unity of religious experience." (Indian Philosophy Vol I, second edition, Page 720). According to Ramanuja, morality does not consist in having a mere view of life, nor in a blind obedience to Shastraic injunctions, but it is coeval with living itself. Wisdom becomes clarified by work, and work becomes purified by wisdom, but these two become ennobled and broadened only through love. In the words of Max Muller, "Ramanuja's sect is actually called Sri Vaishnava. It assumed no doubt the greatest importance as a religious sect as teaching people how to live rather than how to think." (The six Systems of Indian Philosophy, Page 246). This is the central lesson of the Gita, and Ramanuja, with his largest of hearts, has not missed it. To him, Gita is essentially a Shastra of Bhaktiyoga, Bhaktiyoga conjoined with and disciplined by Karma and Gnana.

Varnashrma Dharma

In such a system of ethics as Ramanuja's, we can readily grasp the place of Varna Ashrama Dharma. Ramanuja is the greatest of Vaidiks (Orthodox Brahmins) ever known. But these rules themselves are based on one of the most ennobling of religious principles namely tolerance. One man's food is another man's poison and there certainly cannot be

one and the same set of rules capable of universal application. Varnashrama Dharma teaches what is best for each class of men and at each stage of life, in the onward march of human evolution. Its aim is at once to obtain two birds at one stroke. Whereas from the temporal point of view it is capable of yielding the best of fruits through division of labour and specialisation, aided by heredity and nurture, from the point of view of the spirit, it is capable of lifting it on and on through discipline, tolerance and love. While Ramanuja is not blind to the former aspect, it is with the latter that he is primarily concerned as a formulator of Vedantic ethics.

Ramanuja insists that the three twice-born castes (the Dwijas) the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaisias should follow the path of Bhakti with strict adherence to their respective rules of Varna and Asrama. But Ramanuja recognises, with the Gita, that Bhakti is not the monopoly of the chosen few. Devotion is nothing but a noble turn given to love which is universal. The thirst for God cannot be limited to a few classes alone. For, has not the Gita said, "Samoham sarva bhootheshu naame dveshyosti na priyaha, ye bhajanthitu maam bhaktyaa mayee te theshuchapyaham". Here, it will be well to quote the commentary of Ramanuja as it is most accurately and uniquely translated by A. Govindacharya of Mysore. "Be it the Divine, the human, the animal or the stationary Kingdoms, be they high or low in point of kind (caste), in point of look (colour), in point of nature (character) or in point of enlightenment, as Refuge to all, independent of such distinctions, I am equal. Inferiority as regards kind, look, nature or understanding in any person, does not, because of it, warrant that he is hateful to Me or fit to be rejected as unworthy to come to Me as his Refuge. No one, on the other hand, claiming superiority of caste etc., is because of it, specially entitled to claim Me as his Refuge or has a warrant to be particularly dear to Me. Save the ground that he elects Me as his Refuge not any qualification (as caste, colour etc.) will constitute a claim for My acceptance of his."

"But, whoso, of whichever description they be, worship Me as the object of their most endearing love, worship Me with a fervour, as that without it, their very being would be imperilled, worship Me as that worship alone were their sole end and aim, they without regard for their superiority or inferiority as regards caste, etc., would dwell in Me in such a state of blessedness as compared with only the blessedness of Myself."

"I also dwell in them", i.e. "Dwell in them as if they were My betters!" Ah, what a probe into Divine love! Again, Ramanuja is not blind to the fact that, even with regard to the three twice-borns, love, at certain stages gets above the realm of 'oughts'. Because, for the next sloka, "Abichetsu Duracharo etc.", he comments, "People are born of several castes, each caste having its own rules of conduct whether of the mandatory or of the prohibitory kind. Even if they should transgress those laws they are deserving of being accounted as righteous men, if in the manner aforesaid they do but worship exclusively devoted to Me. Such a person is to be esteemed or honoured as a Sadhu or the most staunch and eminent Vaishnava, or to be classed as equal to those of My worshippers already mentioned."

.....

"He is also to be honoured, in other words, he is not an object to be lightly regarded on account of any slight dereliction from the institutes of his caste, in as much as all his attention and effort are co-centered on the kind of worship aforesaid. He is thus to be more honoured."

In the next sloka, Sri Krishna asks Arjuna himself to swear to the truth of the aforesaid maxim, because in his (Arjuna's) own case, he did not perish owing to the transgression from his duty of fighting (as a Kshatriya) at a critical moment, in as much as he had been all along pitching his faith on Lord Krishna alone. On the other hand, such a faith as this was the very means for his quick ascendance to His grace. Then Sri Krishna winds up this topic with the sloka, "Mamhi Partha, etc.," with an emphasis on the same principle of equality in spiritual paths and this emphasis is significant in as much as it is again and again liable to be overlooked. While many commentators of the Gita have coldly slurred over these Divine expressions of love with a line or two of cold comment, one cannot pass over these lingering trances of Ramanuja over such passages of God's infinite grace and tender care for all without being at the same time struck in turn by the depth of Ramanuja's own devotion and tender solicitude for all humanity explicit in these passages. Let there be no misunderstanding. The rules of Varnashrama have got a splendid purpose to serve if they are only properly understood and well applied. But the modern Pandits' conception of Varnashrama Dharma, as a closed system, with inferiority and superiority complexes attached to it, is a dead corpse many centuries old if at all it had gained currency at any time.

The growth of Bhakti Cults

In the evolution of Hinduism, we are still in the eleventh century, A.D. and that century saw the establishment of Sri Vaishnavism on broader lines through the genius of Ramanuja. The essential humanity in all his teachings and practices was the main cause of its quick march to the remotest corners of our land. His message of love had gone, again and again from the South to the North, Northeast and Northwest and has been spread by many eminent saints and philosophers like Nimbarka, Madhva, Chaitanya, Vallabha, Kabir and Tukaram, who have founded their own schools of Vaishnavism with slight philosophic or religious differences. ("The wave of Bhakti has remained strong from the times of Ramanuja right up to the present day; and the history of this period is the history of Acharyas like Nimbarka, Madhwa, Vallabha and Chaitanya and of the activities of many saints and writers" - Govindalal Hargovind Bhutt, M.A. Prof. Of Sanskrit, Baroda College in "The system of Vallabhacharya" - The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. III). "There is a popular verse to this effect, "Bhakti arose first in Dravida land; Ramananda brought it to the North, and Kabir spread it to the seven continents and nine divisions of the world." - Kshiti Mohan Sen Shastri, M.A. , Principal, Vidhyabhavan, Vishwa Bharati, Shantiniketan, Bengal in "the Mystics of Northern India during the Middle Ages. (The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol.2 Page 249)

In the South too, the post-Ramanujan evolution of Hinduism had a splendid march on still more humanistic lines. The followers of Ramanuja are neither Karma Yogins, nor Gnana Yogins, nor even Bhakti Yogins, but they are Prapannas, that is, the followers of

the fourth path called Prapatti (self-surrender). To understand what Prapatti is, we have to still probe into Ramanuja's character. Though he has proved himself equal to the greatest of philosophers, he was himself essentially and primarily a mystic (one who seeks direct communication with God by self-surrender or Contemplation" - Collins Dictionary) in the liberal and modern sense of the term.

Prapatti or Self-surrender

It is almost a common experience that when we are engaged in any great and serious pursuit, there comes a moment when we are faced with a stumbling block and feel utterly helpless. We have tried to achieve this or that; we think we have very nearly achieved the fruit; but it vanishes. We again try and try again, but in vain. Again we are helpless and feel utterly desperate. But, some time later on and at an entirely unexpected moment, we suddenly feel the fruit in our hands! It has taken us by surprise. It has come through some unknown source and has caught us quite unawares. And we cry out in our joy, "O God, complete surrender to Thee!". " O Light, most kindly Light! Lead Thou me on." "I loved to choose and see my path; but now Lead Thou me on" I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou shouldst lead me on; pride ruled my will, but now lead Thou me on," and so on. It is this mood of surrender that we call mystical and it is in this mood of complete surrender and utter resignation, attained to by the greatest of poets, philosophers and saints all over the world in the noblest moments of their lives, that all the South Indian Vaishnavite saints, known as Alvars (The word Alwar in Tamizh means one deeply immersed in or saturated with devotion to God)) have poured out their divine songs. And it is the conscious living in this mood of entire resignation and prayer, pitching one's faith completely on the Feet of the All-merciful that is called Prapatti.

Though one of the greatest, the most original and boldest of philosophers, Ramanuja had still some doubts; there was still a feeling of incompleteness in his system; he had still some fears. This was scented by his immediate Acharyas who directed him to a distant Acharya, (The name of The Acharya is Thirukkottiyur Nambi) saying that it was only he who had the real message for him. It was that Acharya, who, after evading Ramanuja eighteen times, and only after being convinced thereby of the sincerity of his thirst, that at last gave out the secret of this Prapatti, clothed in the sacred Sri Vaishnavite formulae of Thirumantram, Dvayam, and Charama Slokam, with an admonition that this should not be revealed to the unqualified. But Ramanuja's heart was too large to contain this message of "Grieve Not" within itself. And tradition says, he at once jumped up to the heights of the temple tower and from there proclaimed the message to all. Afterwards when his Acharya required an explanation for this disobedience of his, Ramanuja is reported to have said, "If I should descent to the dark depths of hell in the ascendance of so many to Heaven, I only too gladly welcome it!" At once his Acharya is said to have embraced him with a new dubbing, "Emberumanar" which literally means 'Great Hearted Lord'.

But for this large hearted and uniquely gracious acts of Ramanuja, perhaps we would have lost this message of Prapatti, a wonderful message which is for ever destined to get the final fruit of one's realisation and perfection here and now, the moment one sincerely

thirsts for it. It is this message that another great Post Ramanujan Vaishnavite teacher by name Sri Lokacharya possessed of a still larger heart, had endeavoured to propagate throughout his life, embodying this mantra in as simple as direct and as effective a style as he could, so that not only those who lived and thirsted in his own time but also to those who came after with a thirst, might get saved.

After all, the real purpose of religion is only to point to a true way to the highest kind of happiness and untainted bliss. The sole object of every man on earth is the avoidance of every kind of pain and the attainment of untarnished pleasure. Every man tries to achieve this in his own way. But do the majority of mankind succeed in their attempts? Considered with a cool and unbiased mind, it will be found, that the real clue to success lies only in the line of the spirit or religion. William James, the great philosopher of America, in his 'epoch-making' book "The varieties of Religious Experience", says, "Easily, permanently and successfully it (religion) often transforms the most intolerable misery into the profoundest and most enduring happiness" (page 175). Thanks to the laborious works of modern impartial critics of religion we have got on record persons who have achieved this here and now, and all these persons have been only purely spiritual. The call of these spiritual persons is not to drive us into any fathomless pit of pain and misery, but only to save us from the same towards which we are unknowingly tending. It is the irresistible thirst that springs in them to give to others what they have in themselves achieved, by the grace of the Almighty, that lies as the foundation of every religion. ("He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own" - Confucius.) Again it will be found that between these original persons and founders of religion, there will be absolutely no cause for difference and contradiction. A harmonious adjustment and blending of the different seemingly incompatible elements in experience is one of the main pegs of bliss and the very test of true spiritual realisation.

It will be found that Sri Lokacharya, himself one of such gifted mystics, bases all his treatises on the religious experiences and intuitive outpourings of the Dravidian Saints of the South on the one hand and ancient Seers (Rishis) of the North on the other, and establishing at the same time that these experiences are not the subjective illusions or hallucinations of one or two mad people, but that they have the same force as objectively verifiable facts. ("In spite of their repudiation of articulate self-description, mystical states in general assert a pretty distinct theoretic drift. It is possible to give the outcome of the majority of them in terms that point in definite philosophical directions. One of these directions is optimism and the other is monism." - William James in The Varieties of Religious Experience, Page 416) Truth, for these spiritual teachers, is not different from religion, but it is identical with it. In fact, Sri Vaishnavism is called a 'Sat Sampradhaya' - a religion of truth. And again for a Sri Vaishnava truth is not different from beauty, but it is good and love as well. For him, really it is a living truism. "That beauty, good and knowledge, are three sisters.

And never can be sundered without tears.
And he that shuts love out, in turn shall be
Shut out from love, and on her threshold lie
Howling in outer darkness.."

It is perhaps one of the ways of the Almighty and All-gracious Lord that by directly converting, now and then, by a special fiat of His grace, a few among human beings - these lie in every clime and every walk of life - He pursues for ever His own soul-making process on earth. Sri Lokacharya says in one of his texts entitled 'Sri Vachanabhushanam' that the infinite Spirit reaches the finite only through a greater finite of its own making and the finite too can reach the infinite only through such a greater finite being. The test for these spiritual persons who act as stepping stones to perfection is that, apart from their unshakable faith and devotion to the Almighty, and their own ever-radiating joy, they more or less reflect in their own turn the principal qualities of divinity, viz., sympathy, tolerance and love for all, the high and low alike, themselves moving at the same time with a buoyancy of spirit that knows no taint of pain or grief, doubt or fear regarding anything even though they are placed in the worst of circumstances. It is also a hard fact that the more one identifies oneself with the modes of their living the nearer one tends towards the ultimate goal.

It is to be remembered that Prapatti, which is the basis of Vaishnavism, is essentially a mood of mind, attained to by the greatest of saints, poets and philosophers, and a mode of living according to the same, apparently involving no change in the normal outward life of an individual. On analysis, this will reveal two factors, utter helplessness and resignation (Akinchanya), in respect of the self-effort, and unstinted and one pointed devotion (Ananyagatitwa) in respect of faith, which are the negative and positive aspects of one and the same attitude. In Prapatti, a man's egoity being entirely curbed, his person, now, he feels as God's; his fruit, further, he grants as Gods; and as such he finds no meaning in effort and endeavour to achieve anything for his own. Apparently he may be thinking, talking and moving for himself, but really he thinks, talks and moves only in God.

It is really a man's egoity (Ahankara) which, though works for his own good until a certain stage, turns out afterwards to be itself the root of his whole trouble. Completely annihilating this and freeing himself from all the trammels of blind matter, which had been hitherto blinding and binding himself, a Prapanna now realises that he is truly a son and servant of God in every way. The days are gone when he had been unnaturally fighting and therefore fretting, to accumulate for himself more than his due in Reality, and usurping as his own what but did not belong to him. He now feels as an integral unit of a harmonious family with one main strong and steady stem that will never fail to send its manna in proper proportion, for the maintenance and growth of his blissful life. Saved from his isolated attempts and uncertain moorings in the wild waters of a foreign clime, which clashed at every step with his real nature, and gave a rebuff every moment to his true self, he now breathes the blissful breeze of his own sweet home. His doubts and fears incidental to his life of seclusion and loneliness have dropped once for all, the moment he has found his unshakable and inseparable position on the kind lap of the Almighty.

In Prapatti, a man is no longer an independent and separated entity, strutting on an unsteady ground, with a vague past and dark future, but belongs to a rational system of a

blissful Reality, in which, 'Whatever is is right'. The earthquakes and Volcanoes the famines and pestilences, the murders and wars, however grave they may loom large, for the time being, for others, no longer threaten him as the antagonistic workings of an inimical Satan, but they stand at their worst only as a bread and wild setting that throws out in the main the picture that is the bliss of life. His finite consciousness, which had been hitherto singly travelling in the regions of the wild alone, is now drawn to the tame and widened to enjoy the bliss of the contrast, under the efficient guidance of an all-knowing Hand.

Prapatti is not a life of quietude and passivity as it is erroneously thought of by some. It is not a lounging easy-chair life of a pensioner, who has just retired from active service to enjoy in peace his secured wealth and possessions, relations and friends. In this, cutting oneself free from all the unnatural and therefore painful selfish and competitive activities, one harmoniously establishes oneself in the closer and fuller life of the Spirit that lies as the 'Mainspring' of Reality, and finds joy only in serving as Its willing tool, reflecting for ever the unique merits of the same and praying at the same time for wider and still wider utility in the divine cause. ("Through eternity, I should establish myself in the closer life of the Universal Spirit and serve Its cause quite unswervingly" - Thiruvaimozhi of St. Satagopa, 3-3-1) Breaking out from the binding limitations of a finite, cribbed, cabined, confined and therefore crippled consciousness, by the grace of the Almighty, a Prapanna's knowledge, which has begun to grow free for ever and for ever, is coeval with his ever-widening activity, which is again coeval with his ever-increasing bliss in the eternal and dynamic life of an infinitely richer ultimate Reality. ("The mystic does not recognise any antithesis between the secular and the sacred. Nothing is to be rejected; everything is to be raised. The perfection aimed at is not the perfection of a void, of a nature whose brain is barren and heart dry. The spiritual is not an essence apart to be cloistered and protected from the rest of life, but something which pervades and refines the whole life of man. It cleanses all parts of our inward being and brings about a rebirth of the soul, a redemption of our loyalties and remaking of our personalities. Life puts on immortality and the whole being of man becomes intenser. Feeling the unity of himself and the universe, the man who lives in spirit is no more a separate and self centered individual, but a vehicle of the universal spirit." - Radhakrishnan in 'An Idealist View of Life, Page 105.)

A Prapanna has begun to taste such a life even here and now. His mortal coil no longer stands to constrain him, but only hangs as a shadow of the past. He no longer lingers in its binding and biting grip, but it struggles to breathe its last in him. He may be living in a family, or working in an office, or fighting in a war field; but it is no longer his family but God's, it is no longer his office but God's, it is no longer his war field but God's, in all of which he works as His humble servant to fulfil His noble ends. The more he works in this spirit, the less is his pain, the better he acts, and the greater grows his joy. ("There is but one way in which to give one's self to God - that is, to give one's self entirely, and to keep nothing for one's self. The little that one keeps is only good to trouble one and make one suffer." - Mr. Vianney. Quoted by William James in his "Varieties of Religious Experience, Page 545.) He may meet with failures and problems in life, but they no longer prick him and pain him, but stand at best only as stunts in a game, which he is

confident of overcoming, and even if he does not succeed in some he never minds it, for there is no gain or loss to touch his pocket as he has ceased to own a purse in it. In the circumstance, he only prays for better enlightenment and guidance in more useful ways.

There is a unique feature about Prapatti which requires special mention, especially as it touches the moral responsibility of man. At a superficial thought, it would appear that it leaves no ground for moral endeavour on the part of man except to resign everything in favour of God. It seems to shift the whole burden of responsibility from off his shoulders and throw them totally on those of the Almighty in the spirit, "Save me from pain or not, I have no other saviour." So, from this, can he not take safe refuge in the thought that nothing either good or bad belongs to him and then go on committing all kinds of vicious deeds entirely denying any kind of his personal responsibility for them? Again, is not our Lord full of compassion and love for us, so that whatever we may commit in the nature of crime will only be forgiven and forgotten by Him? Has He not enough Vatsalya (Mercy par excellence considered as the top most among divine merits) to absolve us of any amount of sins we may commit? Further, has He not guaranteed to accept us even though we should take to Him with all our sins? So, why should we try to get ourselves freed from any kind of vice at all? Again, what does it matter if we commit some more of the same kind!

It is the fear of this danger of misunderstanding the real nature of Prapatti, by the less informed and the less qualified, that should have led the earlier Acharyas to keep it as a sealed book to the public. Such questions and doubts as the above can only be raised by a person who has not grasped the fundamental point about Prapatti-selflessness. Sri Lokacharya very emphatically cautions that a person unprepared for the great sacrifice and the one-pointed faith which this step involves will be taking to this as a man will be taking his food in indigestion and will only suffer and perish thereby. He says that a Prapanna who sometimes shudders to do the good lest it should give rise to the elation of self and create egoity, will never stoop to indulge in vice. His conception of vice is so serious and the definition he gives to it is so wise as to include even such minor non-moral acts such as blindly clipping a piece of straw and scratching where it itches under the category of sins while commenting on the word 'Sarva Papebhyo' in the 'Charama Sloka' of the Gita for however insignificant they may be, they are born of one's material habits and rest on the self. In another context he says, that the frame of Prapanna's mind is so delicate that his heart at once sinks at the mere sight of vice, just as a small bird called 'Asanuma' will at once fall to the ground and perish the moment a loud noise is created in its neighbourhood. According to Sri Lokacharya, even the association with one's own wife for personal pleasure, which is allowed to the ordinary man by the Shastras, nay, even enjoined by them as mandatory at certain periods, is a great vice for a Prapanna, for he, who has recognised, as a hard and irrefutable fact, his essential nature of absolute vassalhood and dependence on God in every way, should consider it as a sin to take pleasure in anything which is not in the nature of service or contribution to His glory.

The whole aim of Sri Lokacharya in all his treatises will be to entirely curb even the least trace of a man's egoity which has got a thousand and one subtle ways of taking him by

surprise and dragging him on in its own way to ultimately finish up with him. The moment we give the least room for egoity, matter is there waiting ready to capture us with its Rajas and Thamas. Even our renouncing the good sometimes, and the withdrawal from the act of freeing ourselves from such of our ills that still persist, are due to our fear against this hidden foe. According to Sri Lokacharya, we can better face God with all our faults in humility that blind Him the virtues of our egoity! Yes; let a man place himself in this attitude of complete resignation and faith, and wait and see the result for himself.

What led Henry Newman to utter, "I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou shouldst lead me on. I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears, Pride ruled my will; remember not past years?" The clue to success in the onward march of spiritual evolution lies only in such a surrender as this. "Lord Thy will be done; damn or save!" cries John Nelson, exhausted with the anxious struggle to escape damnation, and at the moment his soul was filled with peace. (William James, T.V.O.R.E., Page 208.)

But from this are we to conclude that a Prapanna should be entirely indifferent to his voices and ills? Should he not at all attempt at being good? Sri Lokacharya, in this connection gives an exhaustive list of a Prapanna's daily rules of conduct tuned to the highest pitch of enlightenment. He says, "standing thus as a fertile ground for egoity, guard thou against thyself as Thou wouldst guard against thy worst enemy, for it (egoity) would sprout at any moment and capture thee with a host of sensual desires and ultimately ruin thee. Against Samsaris (Worldlings) we would encourage thee in thy carnal pursuits, guard thou as thou wouldn't against venomous serpents in a forest; and take to those true Sri Vaishnavas, who would dissuade thee from them, as thou wouldst take to the best intentioned among thy relatives. Coming in contact with God (this can mostly be only in Archa rupa or in the material form of images in temples) take to Him as thou wouldst take to thy kind father who has always only thy good at his heart. If thou shouldst meet thy Acharya (Spiritual teacher) take to him as a most hungry man will take to his most delicious food; and meeting thy disciple regard him as an object of thy most endearing love".

"Beware of egoity; beware of wealth; beware of lusts; for these will take thee away from thy best intentioned friends and lead these to those who are thy worst enemies and thereby ultimately ruin thee. Be sure that the best qualities of the spirit cannot be begotten by thyself or by others who sail in the same boat as thyself; because they can be got only by the grace of the Almighty working through thy spiritual teacher. Be indifferent to the comforts of the physical body and wean thy relish away from material things and fix it on the true qualities of the soul alone. Let the food thou takest be according to the modest traditions of thy family; never run in for new things; let it be enough to maintain thy physical body; and finally regard it as coming from God alone that thou canst best serve Him alone."

"If anything untoward happens to thee never be worried about it but coolly meet it as the result of thy own past conduct, or better try to construe it as coming from God's grace alone to work for thy good alone. Never think that thy conduct, however good it may be,

lays the least obligation on God to shed His grace on thee but bear it that He works for thee quite unconditionally. So fix thy habitation only in those places which have become dear to our Lord (ancient temples) and cultivate a relish for the good conduct of the high souled who live there. Never give room to the least desire for material or undesirable things and always keep thy mind on thy ultimate goal, (This is selfless service in the divine cause according to Vaishnavism.) ever thirsting for it, for as long as there is this physical body there is always a chance of falling."

"Above all, get thyself dearly attached to those who are good, and lead a disciplined life, never for a moment turning to the undesirables for any thing. For, association is the thing that primarily matters as this alone works for one's good or bad at every step. Finally, be sure that these good qualities can never be developed by thy own effort - for it is thyself that wouldst kill thyself, (Srivachanabhushanam, Part-II, 179) but see that thou gettest all these developed through thy close living with and attachment towards thy spiritual teacher."

It will be found that Sri Lokacharya's intention will always be two fold; to point to a high spiritual standard of living and at the same time to root out even the least trace of one's egoity that may at any time crop up to destroy one. Unless we keep these two factors clearly in view, we will be again and again caught up in a vicious circle, the little good we may come to possess giving rise to egoity which will in turn work for our own destruction, a fact which can never be stressed enough. After all, the whole aim of the Vedas and Shastras is only to achieve this end, to wean us away from our false sense of unbridled independence and egoity, and gradually reconcile and unite us with the Absolute, with the recognition of our dependence on It in every way, in which alone should lie our ultimate happiness and bliss. The whole Yogic system of philosophy with all its rules of practice and discipline has this main purpose behind viz., negating the egoism of the individual and affirming it in harmony with the universal spirit and it is this that Sri Lokacharya actually achieves in us through all his writings, by clarifying our knowledge in a way which will never beg of true wisdom, and thereby creating in us a real change of vision and a turn of attitude wherein only should lie the secret of one's self-realisation or Perfection.